

File #

THE OPTIONS

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The map of Boston Harbor on Martha Reardon's office wall is dotted with dreams.

Yellow, red, green and blue stickers represent a fleet of high-speed catamarans departing from Quincy, Hingham, Hull, Plymouth and other spots along the coast south of Boston.

In her plan, ferries slice the waters and speed thousands of South Shore residents to work in Boston or play on the harbor islands, to catch a game at the new Boston Garden or a flight at Logan Airport.

There's a network of buses that zip along local roads, collecting passengers and delivering them to the ferry terminals. And people who live inland can take buses and speed up the Southeast Expressway in a special lane.

"Boats and buses can give you a great flexibility that trains cannot," Reardon says. "The harbor is the equivalent of a 40-lane highway, and it's wide open."

Reardon, a former state highway commissioner, is now an international ferry consultant.

She is also a Hingham resident convinced that restoring the Greenbush commuter rail line from Braintree to Scituate would ruin the town's historic square, where she maintains an office just steps from the tracks.

Reardon's ideas have been embraced by the Coastal Coalition, a group of South Shore residents fighting the Greenbush plan.

The coalition says expanded ferry service can attract as many new passengers as a railroad at one-quarter to one-sixth the cost. And they can transport people without

damaging the environment or disrupting daily life the way trains would, members say.

Furthermore, Reardon says, the Hingham commuter boat earns back 50 percent of its state subsidy at the fare box. That's the best return of any of the T's transit services.

And boats may not need a subsidy at all,

Reardon says. She points to New York and other cities where private boat operators run ferries without public money.

Critics say boats are unreliable. But ferry operator Bill Spence says he rarely misses a trip between Hingham and Boston and that his boats even ran during the Blizzard of 1978.



Martha Reardon of Hingham, a commuter-boat consultant who opposes the Greenbush line, reads a report in her office in Hingham Square.